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THE SCHOOL BOARD
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TO IMPROVE
RELATIONSHIPS

SAN FRANCISCO
PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMISSION
REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DOCUMENTS

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The San Francisco Public Schools Commission was formed in January 1975 as a cooperative effort by the Board of Education of the San Francisco Unified School District and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The general objectives of the Commission are to identify problems in the School District and to assist in implementing agreed-upon solutions. The Commission is supported through grants from the San Francisco Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Irwin Foundation, the Gerbode Foundation, and the San Francisco Unified School District.

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Mr. Yori Wada

Dr. Luvern L. Cunningham, Executive Director

**REPORT
AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
THE SCHOOL BOARD AND
THE SUPERINTENDENT**

**THE SAN FRANCISCO
PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMISSION
JUNE 1976**

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Chairman

DR. LUVERN L. CUNNINGHAM
Executive Director

June 16, 1976

Dr. Lee S. Dolson
President, Board of Education
San Francisco Unified School District
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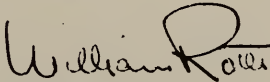
Dear Dr. Dolson:

Throughout the course of the Commission's work, we have been concerned with the interaction among the School Board, the Superintendent, and the public. Specifically, we have recognized the need for the Board to establish itself clearly as the policy-making body for the District, to delegate authority and responsibility for day-to-day implementation to the Superintendent, and to enhance the involvement of the public in school issues.

This report highlights a number of issues that need to be addressed by the Board and advances recommendations consistent with those needs. You will note that two recommendations that were contained in previous drafts have been deleted to provide additional time for the Commission to analyze their impact. One suggested the creation of the position of "policy analyst"; the other recommended the establishment of a "citizens' audit committee". We shall report at a later time on these two notions should the Commission take action in their regard.

Our general recommendations to improve Board/Superintendent relationships have been advanced on a number of occasions in a variety of ways, and we have noted some progress and some retrogression. We wish to reemphasize the crucial nature of this relationship and urge the Board to adopt and adhere to policies which will facilitate educational decision-making. We stand ready to work with the Board and the District's staff to implement these recommendations toward improving education in San Francisco.

Sincerely,


William M. Roth
Chairman

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INTRODUCTION

Members of the San Francisco Public Schools Commission have spent more than a year in monitoring, assessing, and commenting on the sensitive and important interactions among the School Board, the Superintendent, and the public. The panoply of problems and issues surrounding these relationships includes matters of various magnitudes, ranging from general Board policy on significant educational issues to narrow procedural changes regarding how the Board conducts its business.

In its review of this critical area, Commissioners and staff have attended meetings of the Board and its committees; interviewed most members of the Board, the Superintendent and several members of the central administrative staff; conducted workshops to which members of the Board and the Superintendent were invited; talked with persons who have been attending Board meetings for years; examined pertinent documents such as the Code of Ethics of the California School Boards Association; and held a public forum on Board/Superintendent relationships. Staff and consultants have developed several background papers to assist the Commission in making its recommendations.

A number of changes have occurred within the San Francisco Unified School District since the Commission began its work. Many of those changes have been the subject of discussions between the Commission and Board members or District staff. However, changes have been made frequently *before* any formal recommendation has been made by the Commission. We believe that the interactions among the Superintendent and his staff, members of the Board, members of the Commission and its staff, and the general public have all contributed to the identifiable changes in procedure and in tone that now exist. This report repeats some of the Commission's earlier recommendations and adds some new suggestions for action.

NEEDS IDENTIFIED

In its efforts to improve the relationships between the Board of Education and the Superintendent, the Commission has identified five basic needs which must be met if the District is to function effectively

in its mandated responsibility to educate the children of San Francisco. Those needs are:

- Need 1: There must be a clear delegation of authority and responsibility by the Board of Education to the Superintendent of Schools and the administrative staff.
 - Need 2: The Board must reorder its priorities to give the greatest emphasis to its role as effective policy-maker for the School District.
 - Need 3: Orderly processes must be developed for conducting Board business and for decision-making based upon objective, well-prepared information.
 - Need 4: The public must be a partner in the decision-making process through a variety of techniques designed to heighten its awareness of educational issues and encourage its enlightened participation in problem-solving.
 - Need 5: The Board of Education must develop and employ rational procedures for the appointment and evaluation of its chief executive officer, the Superintendent of Schools.
- These identified needs lead to a series of recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Need 1: There must be a clear delegation of authority and responsibility by the Board of Education to the Superintendent and the administrative staff.

The State Education Code is clear in the assignment of ultimate responsibility for the operation of a school district to the governing board. However, the realities of life in a school district the size and complexity of San Francisco dictate the necessity and wisdom of substantial delegation of authority for day-to-day administration to the District's Superintendent.

The elected Board is part-time and it seems sensible to create an organizational framework which permits these officials to address themselves, creatively, to establishing policies within which the District can develop a school system of the highest caliber — one in which teachers, administrators, students and parents can function in the harmonious relationship necessary for effective learning.

It is not sensible for the Board to spend its available time in handling the myriad administrative decisions required in the implementation of the Board's policies. The Board, in fulfilling its legal mandate, should select the most capable executive officer who can be recruited and should give that person the authority to recruit, select, train, assign, transfer, promote, suspend and dismiss personnel of the District.

Maintaining the delicate balance between policy formulation and administration is the key to an effective working relationship between a board of education and its chief executive, the Superintendent. The San Francisco Unified School District has been plagued by poor relationships between its policy makers and its managers. There has been a confusion of roles that tends to increase tensions and destroy effective administration.

Recommendation 1-A: That the Board delegate to its chief executive, the Superintendent, the authority necessary to hire and lead the central administrative staff and to manage the day-to-day operation of the School District.

Recommendation 1-B: That the Employee Relations Officer, suggested by the Commission in July of 1975 and endorsed by the Board in its approval of the Superintendent's organizational plan on August 13, 1975, be hired immediately and be made directly responsible to the Superintendent and through the Superintendent to the Board; and that the Employee Relations Officer be given the necessary authority to bargain effectively with employee groups within the parameters established by the Board.

This recommendation is of particular urgency because of the imminence of collective bargaining under the terms of the Rodda Act and the need for the District to develop a rational and responsible position on matters that will be the subject of negotiation between the District and its employees.

Need 2: The Board must reorder its priorities to give the greatest emphasis to its role as effective policy-maker for the District.

The San Francisco Unified School District is faced with serious long- and short-range questions of policy and direction which demand the most creative and carefully considered decisions. The establishment

of policy and the provision of the broad framework of purpose to guide the development and evaluation of the School District are the highest responsibility of the governing board.

In the absence of a statement of goals and objectives, there are no standards by which the Board may evaluate the Superintendent or by which the public may evaluate the Board. There must be a joint commitment to common goals and objectives to provide direction for the District. On the recommendation of the Superintendent, the Board has now adopted the Educational Redesign Plan — a significant step towards cohesive policy for the District. The Redesign Plan must be evaluated on an ongoing basis to determine whether it is meeting the needs of students and improving the quality of education in the District.

Recommendation 2-A: That the Board place a high priority on policies for implementing such statements of District goals and objectives as the Educational Redesign Plan; that a calendar which outlines the major activities of the District in support of implementation efforts be developed; and that a system for assessing the impact of those goals and objectives on achievement levels of students be instituted.

The basis for evaluating educational programs depends, in large measure, on the availability of accurate, meaningful data and information about the programs and their impact on students. Information on budget, on characteristics of schools, on parent involvement, and on student achievement must be accessible not only to the Board for its own use in policy-making, but also to parents, students and teachers. Other Commission work has addressed this important question of basic information. The Board has taken action to approve a staff proposal to use CETA monies to plan and staff an Administrative Information System. The Commission considers a reliable, comprehensive information system a necessary tool for strengthening the policy-making role of the Board.

Recommendation 2-B: That a management and educational information system be established to collect, synthesize and report data which can be used by the District, parents, students and the general public to assess the effectiveness of the schools in meeting educational needs.

A well-codified set of Board policies and administrative rules and regulations is indispensable to effective performance of a school board and its superintendent. Until recently, the District had no formal system for cross-referencing, checking internal consistency, and continually updating policies and administrative regulations adopted by the Board. Since autumn of 1975, a codification process, initiated by a Board member and carried forward by staff, has been underway and is nearly complete. In addition, a Weekly Administrators' Directive (WAD) has been instituted; it updates Board members and staff on changes in policy and administrative procedures.

Recommendation 2-C: That the codification and dissemination of Board policies and administrative procedures continue and that the public be given access to the materials assembled in this process.

Need 3: Orderly processes must be developed for conducting Board business and for decision-making based upon objective, well-prepared information.

Historically, a major source of friction between the Board and its chief executive officer, the Superintendent, has been the dissatisfaction Board members often feel about the information provided by the staff. Board members have frequently complained about the lack of accurate, complete, and concisely-stated reports. They have objected to being "propogandized", rather than informed, by the Superintendent and administrative staff; they have complained about documents that are sometimes too lengthy and loaded with jargon, and at other times too general and too brief to provide for sensible deliberation. They have agonized over receiving mountains of data too late to assess the import of the information on which they must base decisions.

Recommendation 3-A: That the Superintendent and staff be responsible for providing the Board with a full range of policy options on issues before them for decision; that the implications of each option be presented; that the agenda and material for Board action be sent to Board members at least one week in advance of the meeting at which action is to be taken; and that wherever possible, summaries of complex and lengthy documents be prepared as guides for Board members.

The Commission is encouraged by the report that staff has already implemented the recommendation concerning timely forwarding of materials to members of the Board. The District's administrative staff is currently burdened by extensive and uncoordinated demands for detailed information from Board members. These individual requests occupy an inordinate amount of staff time. There has been no system for determining the priority on these requests, for designating an appropriate staff person to gather the information, or for setting a target date for response to the requests that are made.

Recently, an improved system has been installed. Following each regular meeting, a summary is prepared which details the requests, indicates the staff assigned to respond, and sets a time-line for reporting back to the Board. However, a system is still needed for prioritizing the results in some manner so that staff is not deluged. It is also important that the Board be assured that it is getting complete information which is accessible to all Board members, and that resolutions by Board members have an opportunity to be reviewed by staff before action is taken.

The management and conduct of Board meetings is a crucial aspect of the Board's work and can help or hinder the Board's effectiveness as a policy-making body. The frequency of Board meetings, the format of the agenda, and the procedures for Board and public participation are all related to the Board's capacity to formulate policies effectively. Meetings of the Board have often been characterized by a lack of order and decorum. Much time is expended in Board deliberation on very routine matters.

Recommendation 3-B: That the Board delegate to staff the authority to handle such routine, but time-consuming, agenda items as small expenditures, name changes of personnel, lateral transfers of personnel, etc.; and that staff report to the Board, on a monthly basis, actions taken in these areas of delegated authority.

Recommendation 3-C: That the Board establish a consent agenda to facilitate items on which there is no disagreement among the Board members.

The Commission believes that a consent agenda may contribute to further efficiencies in the transaction of the Board's business. A consent agenda allows for the grouping of like items under categories, as is

current practice, e.g., finance resolution or business, grounds, and services resolutions. All items placed on the consent agenda (sometimes called "omnibus category") are to be considered as approved unless an individual Board member or a citizen wishes to discuss an item or items as a part of a regular meeting. The items are thus *approved by consent* unless requests for public review are filed with the Secretary to the Board. Agenda and supporting materials, as recommended elsewhere, are to be mailed one week in advance of the meeting at which they are to be considered. Requests for review of items at the regular meeting should be filed on the Friday preceding the Tuesday at which they will receive consideration.

Recommendation 3-D: That items on the agenda be ordered in a way that allows educational issues to appear early during the meeting, especially those items where substantial numbers of persons wish to speak.

Currently, there is no systematic way to prioritize items on the Board's agenda. Usually, routine financial and personnel items appear first and educational issues appear last. Routine matters can be cumbersome and time-consuming, thus leading to hasty and frustrated deliberation on the crucial issues at the end of the meeting.

Recommendation 3-E: That the Board continue the practice of holding two regular business meetings a month and reserving the time for two special meetings a month.

The Commission suggested this division to the Board informally and is pleased to see it adopted in principle. The first and third Tuesdays of the month are now set aside for special meetings; the second and fourth Tuesdays are regularly scheduled for business meetings. The new procedure permits more time between business meetings to give the staff the opportunity for quality preparation of reports for the Board and to give Board members time to read and digest some of the complex data on which they are asked to act. The special meetings will provide a forum in which more philosophical discussions can take place among the Board members and the public on issues of educational importance.

Recommendation 3-F: That the Board revise its procedures for public participation in the regular business meetings to assure an orderly process for hearing "pros" and "cons" on issues on which the Board must act; and that the Board establish a less restrictive set of procedural rules for public participation at special meetings.

The Commission is strongly committed to open and intelligent communication between the Board and the public. It believes that the present haphazard, unstructured "system" of requests to speak before the Board has not served the purpose of reasoned communication and should be revised. Specific suggestions have been made on such revisions, but they are not cast in concrete. More exploration of the subject is needed. The communication between the Board and the public need not take place only in the arena of the regular business meeting where time is limited; "special" meetings can be used effectively to enhance both the quality and the quantity of the dialogue on educational issues.

Recommendation 3-G: That the District develop and widely disseminate to the public a brochure "To Help You Participate in Educational Decision-Making" which will outline the procedures for regular business meetings and special meetings and which will encourage the public to attend and participate in educational decision-making under guidelines that are fair, rational and known.

Such a brochure would be an invaluable aid for the public and for the Board.

Need 4: The public must be a partner in the decision-making process, through a variety of techniques designed to heighten their awareness of educational issues and encourage their enlightened participation in problem-solving.

The Board has a responsibility to serve the needs of the students of San Francisco as effectively as possible in an era when those needs are constantly shifting and when public support is frequently needed to assure the financial and educational viability of the schools. The public's participation at Board meetings is only one way for the public to express its views. Other methods are needed to create the effective partnership that will produce the best possible education for San Francisco youngsters.

Recommendation 4-A: That a simple, inexpensive polling device be developed and employed periodically to assess community feelings on specific educational issues.

There are a number of ways in which media, community organizations, and the schools can be mobilized to assist in such a polling mechanism.

Recommendation 4-B: That the Board and the Superintendent employ the format of a public forum to develop a constructive pattern of communication among themselves and the general public on critical issues confronting the School District.

Both the Board and the Superintendent have been concerned about their ability to share their views openly and candidly with each other and with the public. Regular meetings are too restricted by time and often too politicized to allow for such a learning/sharing session. It is not possible, and indeed not desirable, for Board members and the Superintendent to agree on every issue. Differences of opinion are conducive to change and improvement. However, when differences are released in a hostile and politicized atmosphere, damage occurs to the relationship between the Board and the Superintendent and among Board members.

The Commission has introduced the concept of public forums during its own activities and has found it an effective way to provide a non-politicized setting in which the Board, the Superintendent and the public can debate issues of common concern. The purpose of the public forum is not to make decisions, but to share information, to articulate points of view, and to explore alternative solutions to problems. The physical environment and format of the forum must encourage free exchange of ideas among all participants. It is also important that the forums be accessible to a wide range of people, and they should be conducted in neighborhoods throughout the City to assure such access.

Recommendation 4-C: That the School District adopt the concept of the Loan Executive Program established by the Commission to draw the talents and resources of various sectors of the Community into problem-solving partnership with the District.

Time and again the School District has spent substantial sums of money to hire outside management consultant teams to examine the problems in the District and to offer recommendations. It was not until recently that the Board made an effort to utilize the rich resources of the business and industrial communities and to bring them to bear on the problems of the District. In February 1976, under the sponsorship of the Commission, executives from Standard Oil of California, Bank of America, Southern Pacific, and Pacific Gas and Electric were "loaned" to the School District. The Loan Executives Program is an excellent example of one form of community involvement in the schools. The talents and skills of these executives are directed toward solving some of the most severe problems of budget development, financial management, purchasing, management systems, payroll and position control.

There are other resources existing in various sectors of the community — including labor unions, community service organizations, arts and humanities, and health organizations — which would be invaluable to the District.

Recommendation 4-D: That one student from each high school journalism class be invited to sit at the press tables at Board meetings.

The Commission believes that the District can enhance the diverse interests of high school students by providing an opportunity for them to practice their skills in journalism. Further, students would be able to observe the Board of Education in deliberations and to report back to their schools on how the Board's decisions might affect their education.

It is important that policies and programs be periodically evaluated to assure that they are achieving the desired results — improving the educational quality of San Francisco schools. There is an on-going need for an independent evaluation by an interested group without a proprietary motive for endorsing a specific program or policy.

Recommendation 4-E: That voting records of each Board member on major issues be compiled and made public annually; that Board member attendance at Board and committee meetings be recorded; that a community organization or a panel of community leaders be asked to study and report annually on the Board's effectiveness.

The policy actions and voting patterns of Board members are of critical importance and should be regularly evaluated so that citizens have some rational information on which to judge the adequacy of a Board member's performance. Board members stand for election every four years, but citizens rarely have the opportunity to review and evaluate their performance. Voting decisions are frequently made on the basis of emotionalism — frequently around manufactured issues. The public is entitled to an ongoing evaluation of the stewardship of Board members entrusted with the responsibility for ensuring a quality education for each child. The annual voting record review would be an important innovation.

These recommendations are only a few of the many possibilities for firing the imagination of the public and involving them — in a qualitative as well as quantitative fashion — in school decision-making. The District should explore, initiate and publicize other mechanisms for community involvement.

Need 5: The Board of Education must develop and employ rational procedures for the appointment and evaluation of its Chief Executive Officer, the Superintendent of Schools.

The San Francisco Unified School District has had a rapid and disruptive turnover in superintendents in the past several years. In urging the Board to focus on the superintendent selection and evaluation process, the Commission is not passing judgment on the incumbent Superintendent. The Commission believes that stability in this office is of paramount importance to the development and implementation of policies which will serve the needs of the children of San Francisco. The present Superintendent has the right to a clear understanding of the qualities on which he will be evaluated, and any future superintendent should be selected according to established criteria and through a procedure that is both fair and open.

The Commission has frequently expressed its strong conviction about the need for an able superintendent who has a clear outline of the responsibilities of the job, and the authority to do the job. Having assured the superintendent of both those concepts, the Board must then hold the Chief Executive Officer for the District accountable for actions taken in the performance of the job.

The Commission endorses the concept of public involvement in the selection of a Superintendent and considers the procedures used in the selection of the incumbent Superintendent a valuable innovation which should be retained. The process should include:

- Expert advice (through a paid consultant, if necessary) on the selection process and the qualifications for a superintendent.
- A thorough search for candidates with special outreach designed to meet equal opportunity guidelines.
- A screening process to provide a method for reducing the candidate pool to a manageable number (no more than seven candidates).
- A representative community committee to participate in the interview of final candidates and recommend top contenders.
- Final selection by the Board with a clear agreement on the precise responsibilities and authority of the Superintendent.
- A system of evaluation incorporated into the contractual agreement with the Superintendent selected.

The Commission would further suggest that on-site visits by Board representatives be made to the place of former employment of the top three candidates.

Recommendation 5-A: That the Board adopt a selection policy that incorporates the elements spelled out above.

The Commission further believes that it is essential to develop and carry out a procedure for evaluating the Superintendent. This is consistent with our repeated recommendations on evaluation of others in the School District — teachers, principals, students and Board members. When a Superintendent has been selected, has been given a clear description of duties and responsibilities, and has been given the authority to carry out those duties and responsibilities, it is appropriate to demand accountability and require an evaluation of performance. That evaluation must be objective and it must be based on agreed-upon criteria to eliminate any possibility of political harassment. Those criteria should be measurable and specific, not vague. The District has moved in this direction by its commitment to develop and use a *formal* evaluation procedure in assessing the performance of the incumbent Superintendent. It must fulfill that commitment as rapidly as possible.

Recommendation 5-B: That the Board continue its efforts to refine and agree upon a "performance evaluation" instrument; that it seek input from the public on the criteria; that it agree on a regular interval for the evaluation that should not be less than once every two years; and that it inform the public of final procedures and criteria for the evaluation.

CONCLUSION

In essence, the Commission's recommendations expand on the concepts enunciated in the Code of Ethics of the California School Board Association*, which calls on school board members to commit themselves, as a first priority, to the well-being of each child in school. Their crucial roles require that they act on the basis of thorough information, that they maintain open communication with the public and that they select an able superintendent and give him/her the authority to implement Board established policies.

The major public contribution made by School Board members to their community is frequently underestimated and unappreciated. Further, the immense complexity of the job of a school superintendent in an urban district is rarely comprehended. The Commission has observed, and is impressed by, the conscientious attention of Board members and staff to the business of the District. The pressures of their responsibilities have seldom given them much time to plan together on a regular basis. The Commission has played an important role in stimulating that essential communication among these decision-makers and urges that these efforts be continued.

The problems of Board/Superintendent relationships in San Francisco are severe, but they are not unique. The issues on which we have focused are nearly universal — the need for accurate, dependable information; clarity in roles and responsibilities; strong executive leadership; public participation; Board and staff training; sound procedures for administration; and time for reasoned reflection. To avoid paralysis in a system that must remain vital, new methods for meeting critical needs must be found. Some of those new methods are recommended in this report; there are infinitely more than can be found by expanding the circle of those who should care about the schools. The Commission strongly urges the School District to expand that circle — in pursuit of quality education for San Francisco's children.

*See Appendix.

APPENDIX

CODE OF ETHICS OF THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

A code of ethics is an expression of those personal ideals which should guide an individual's daily activities.

In all my actions as a School Board Member, my first commitment is to the well-being of our youth. My primary responsibility is to each child — regardless of race, creed, color, sex, or national origin.

I also have other commitments to:

The Community. I am responsible to all citizens of the district and not solely to those who elected me; nor to any organization of which I may be a member.

Individuals. I have a direct concern for every individual in the community. As an integral part of my duties, I represent the authority and responsibility of government. This represents the delegated authority of the majority and must be exercised with as much care and concern for the least influential as for the most influential member of the community.

Employees. The district is a major employer of the community. My actions as a board member may affect the capability of district employees to practice their trade or profession.

Laws, Policies. I must be aware of, and comply with, the constitution of State and Nation, the Education Code of the State of California, other laws pertaining to public education, and the established policies of the district.

Decision Making. It is my obligation, under the law, to participate in decisions pertaining to education in the district. As an elected representative of the people, I can neither relinquish nor delegate this responsibility to any other individual or group.

Individual Feelings and Philosophy. Like every other individual, I have something to contribute to society.

Understanding and acting the foregoing premises, I shall:

Consider my position as a board member as a public trust and not use it for private advantage or personal gain.

Be constantly aware that I have no legal authority except when I am acting as a member of the board. I shall present my concerns and

concepts through the process of board debate and, if in the minority on any decision, I shall abide by and support the majority decision. When I am in the majority, I shall respect divergent opinions.

Encourage ideas and opinions from the citizens of the district and endeavor to incorporate their views in the deliberations and decisions of the board.

Devote sufficient time, thought, and study to proposed actions to be able to base my decisions upon all available facts and vote my honest convictions unswayed by partisan bias of any kind.

Remember that the basic functions of the board are to establish the policies by which the schools of the district are to be administered and to select the superintendent and staff who will implement those policies.

Promote and participate actively in a concerted program of timely exchange of information with all citizens, parents, employees and students of the district.

Recognize that the deliberations of the board in executive session are not mine to release or discuss. They may be released or discussed in public only with the approval of the board.

Avail myself of opportunities for enlargement of my potential as a board member through participation in educational conferences, workshops, and training sessions made available by local, state, and national agencies.

